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# DES

**The wonder drug  
you should  
wonder about**



**Massachusetts Department of Public Health  
Division of Preventive Medicine**

## What is DES?

- Diethylstilbestrol (DES) is a hormone that was commonly prescribed for complications of pregnancy to approximately six million women in the United States between 1941 and 1971.
- DES was given in the form of pills, shots, and suppositories. It was sold under many different brand names.
- DES was given to women from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

## Why should you wonder about it?

DES mothers and both their daughters and sons may develop health problems that include reproductive and urinary tract abnormalities. A small number of DES daughters (1 in 5,000) have developed a rare type of cancer.

To prevent possible medical complications, it is important to be thoroughly informed about DES.

**Mothers:** Examine your breasts once a month and get a professional breast examination once a year.

**Daughters:** All DES daughters need special examinations once a year. Call **1-800-422-6237** for names of clinics and physicians who do these examinations, or visit your own doctor.

**Sons:** Call a urologist for an examination if you have any questions or problems.

## How to find out if you were exposed to DES?

- Ask your mother if she had problems with any pregnancies.
- Did she take any hormone drugs during pregnancy?
- Did she have bleeding or diabetes, a history of miscarriages or premature births?
- Ask her to contact her obstetrician to find out if she was given DES.

# DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS

## Public Information and Education

The Division of Preventive Medicine is responsible informing the public about the medical complications associated with DES and encouraging people to have yearly physical examinations.

- Informational brochures are available for the general public.
- Medical informational brochures are available for physicians and other health professionals.
- Posters are available upon request.
- A Speaker's Bureau made up of DES daughters, sons and mothers, and health care providers is available for public speaking engagements.

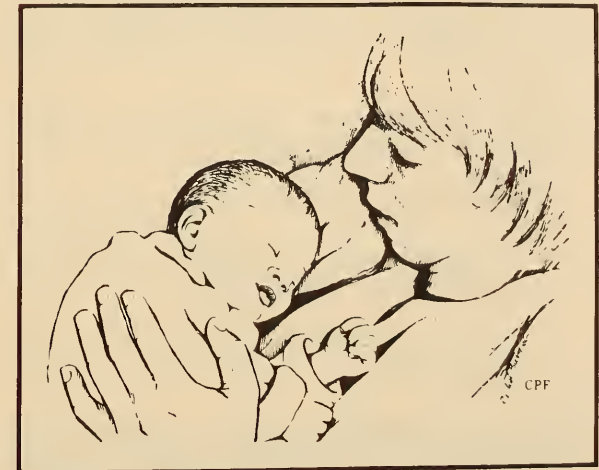
**In our effort to reach a wide population, the DES programs has sponsored a variety of initiatives.**

- Television public service announcements.
- Numerous talk shows on television and radio.
- The distribution of materials to health facilities, women's organizations, pharmacies, libraries, and other community groups.
- Public education forums for a wide range of community organizations.

## Diagnostic Services

The Division of Family Health Services has designated certain medical facilities located throughout Massachusetts to provide specialized diagnostic evaluations for DES daughters.

- These services are available to any woman who suspects she may have been exposed to DES and consist of a comprehensive examination.
- Apart from this comprehensive examination, women are encouraged to have a yearly DES check-up with their regular health care provider.
- No one will be turned away because of inability to pay.
- For information on the location of these diagnostic services, call toll-free **1-800-422-6237**.





## **DES Law in Massachusetts Summary**

The DES Law was passed in December of 1981 through the efforts of the Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators, the DES ACTION Project, and a number of committed individuals and organizations.

- The Massachusetts Department of Public Health has been designated to:

Establish a DES public education program

Determine regional diagnostic evaluation centers for DES Daughters

Provide educational programs for physicians and nurses

- The law prohibits health and life insurance companies from discriminating against persons exposed to DES.

## **DES Action of Massachusetts**

**DES Action is a national organization providing education to the public and to health professionals about DES. They help many people who were exposed to DES find out about their exposure and the care they need. They also sponsor a variety of activities ranging from support groups to advocacy work.**

**DES ACTION  
P.O. Box 126  
Stoughton, MA 02072  
(617) 828-7461**

## **Books on DES**

**DES: The Complete Story** by Cynthia Orenburg  
St. Martins Press, New York, 1981

**DES Daughter: A True Story of Tragedy and Triumph** by Joyce Bichler, Avon Books, New York, 1981.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION  
OR  
LOCATION OF THE  
NEAREST HEALTH CARE FACILITY  
SPECIALIZING IN DES EXAMS**

**CALL TOLL-FREE  
1-800-422-6237**

**Michael S. Dukakis, Governor  
Manuel Carballo, Secretary of Human Services  
Alfred L. Frechette M.D., Commissioner of Public Health  
APRIL, 1983**